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Inaugural Address

—OF—

President George Butler Griffin,

READ FEBRUARY 9, 1891.

Fellow Members of the Historical Society of Southern California:

IN accordance with custom I beg leave to submit the following brief remarks: When it is considered that our society hitherto has possessed neither a suitable abiding place, nor even a proper legal existence, with greater heartiness, it seems to me, we may congratulate ourselves upon the progress we have made from year to year, until today we have in our possession a goodly number of printed works and manuscripts of no inconsiderable value, as well as a constantly increasing collection of objects of interest such as are to be found usually in the rooms of an association whose field of research is so extensive as ours. The progress we have made in the past naturally will stimulate us to increased endeavor in the future. While I thank you for the honor you have been pleased to confer upon me, I am well aware that, should my administration prove to be successful, it will be because of the cordial support which the various committees and individual members shall give to the general well-being. Persuaded that this support will be given cheerfully, I am confident, therefore, that we shall take no step backward, because we shall bear in mind that conception is merely the beginning of endeavor, and these only preliminary steps toward the accomplishment of the end all of us have in view.

We have been promised by the board of supervisors that, when the court house—now a building—is ready for occupancy, quarters therein will be provided for our society, and our books, manuscripts and other property can then be arranged in such manner as to be easy of access and of real, practical value to ourselves and to other students. Yet it is to be hoped that we do not remain content even with this great gain. It should be our continual aim, and I think that we are all of this opinion, to make every effort tending towards obtaining a home of our own, nor should we relax our efforts until the end is gained. It was hoped that aid from the state, in the

shape of an appropriation, would be extended to us by the legislature now in session, and the necessary bill had been prepared by a member from the county of Los Angeles, but, it seems, the law forbids such appropriation of the public funds, and we must depend upon ourselves for the realization of our wishes. The gods help him who helps himself, and I doubt not that our energy will prove equal to the occasion. I suggest that the constitution be so amended as to provide for the creation of a standing committee on life-memberships, and that it shall be the duty of this committee to invite citizens of Southern California to become life-members of the society, with the distinct understanding that all sums obtained from the payment of life-membership dues be set apart as a fund for the purchase of a building-site, and the erection thereon and proper furnishing of a suitable building. It is well known that there are many patriotic and wealthy citizens of Southern California, who, it cannot be doubted, would become life-members of the society on condition that the amounts paid by them for such memberships should be so dedicated, and, it seems to me, it might not be impossible to obtain from some wealthy resident of a city, of which all residents are so properly proud, the gift of a site on which to build. In no more fitting way could some one of the many public-spirited individuals among us transmit an honored name to the respectful admiration of those who shall come after us.

As yet the society has no legal being. At our recent annual meeting, with gratifying unanimity, you were pleased to take the most important step which, in my opinion, has been taken since we first assembled together. Until now we have formed merely an association of ladies and gentlemen held together by a common love of inquiry in the broad field of historic and scientific research; yet, as a society, having no legal existence, nor any well defined right to hold the valuable property we consider ours. We have good reason to congratulate ourselves that we are so soon to become a corporation duly organized under the laws of the state. This legal status once acquired, it can not be doubted that many who now hold aloof will join us as active co-workers in our important undertaking, and that many others will present to us the books, documents and collections of other kinds we cannot hope to receive otherwise. Indeed I am assured that there are many such persons who await the desired consummation in order to bring gifts to the society.

There exist in our archives many valuable papers on various subjects, which have been read before the society but which still remain in manuscript. The advisability of securing in a more

permanent manner the usefulness of these contributions to knowledge is patent to all, and I recommend that the committee on publications take the necessary steps for the printing of these papers at as early a date as may be practicable.

Although some weeks must pass before we shall be able to take possession of our promised quarters in the court-house, it will be advisable for us to consider, meanwhile, that we shall be called upon to furnish these quarters appropriately. I suggest, therefore, that, if this very important matter come not within the province of some one of our actual standing committees, a special committee be appointed whose duty it shall be to solicit, from members and from citizens, friendly to and interested in the welfare of the society, subscriptions to a fund for the proper furnishing of the rooms of the society.

In order to carry out the various suggestions which I have thought it my duty to make to you, to the consideration of which I earnestly invite your attention, it is obvious that the general fund must be considerably increased. While the list of active members is increasing constantly, the amount received from dues paid by members will not be sufficient, in future, for our needs. It may, or it may not be, advisable to increase the annual dues of active members to five dollars; but let us remember that each of us should consider himself one of a committee which is not appointed under the rules but which includes all of us, and endeavor to add as many names as possible to the list of active members.

In this connection, and it seems to me a feasible way of increasing the general fund, I suggest that the society should, as soon as may be, undertake the management of a course of lectures or other suitable public entertainments. This is in accord with the spirit of our constitution, and would not only prove to be a prolific source of revenue to the society, but would be productive of lasting benefit to the general public.

It is not necessary for me to remind you that we shall not be able to advance the objects for the furtherance of which we are associated except it be by systematic work. The objects for which this society exists are many in number, and I am very confident that there is not one of our members whose views on one, or more, of the topics mentioned in the constitution could fail to be of interest and benefit to that society in a more extended sense of which we are all members. We have accomplished a great deal; but we can, and should, accomplish a great deal more. It is to be hoped, therefore, that the various committees, in the discharge of their duties, will foment the reading of papers on branches of

investigation to which members of the society have given special attention.

I recommend, further, the creation of a standing committee charged with the duty of collecting books, manuscripts and objects of all kinds which may be worthy of preservation, and which should be solicited from persons now possessing them, for we are all aware that many such books, documents and objects exist in the possession of a generation now passing away rapidly. There are many who do not properly esteem these treasures; many who would cheerfully surrender to an institution such as ours, the custodianship—for, practically, this society is merely the custodian of things which in a sense belong to the community at large—of things that assuredly would be more safely guarded and preserved for posterity if deposited in the archives of this society. Time is the devourer of all things, and if a society such as ours do not interest itself in their preservation, within a very few years many things, that would prove of inestimable value to the future historian of the great and growing region we inhabit, will be lost forever. Especial attention should be given to the collection of autobiographies of both men and women among those who dwelt here before the American occupation of California and of pioneers of the existing commonwealth. This is a field that has been but hastily reaped, and the gleaning may well prove to be of greater value than the scanty crop harvested by historians.

In conclusion I recommend a careful consideration of the by-laws, which, after incorporation, we must necessarily adopt.

